

Gone Baby Gone (2007)

Rated R. Our ratings: V- 4; L- 1; S/N-5. Running time: 1 hour 54 min.

Who can search out our crimes?

We have thought out a cunningly conceived plot.

For the human heart and mind are deep.

Psalms 64:6

Ben Affleck moves behind the camera as co-writer and director of this haunting thriller. Based on the novel by Dennis Lehane, (c) 2007 Miramax Films

who also wrote Mystic River, it shares the latter's dark outlook

on the depths to which even good people might resort when they are desperate. Casey Affleck as Patrick Kenzie and Michelle Monaghan as Angie Gennaro are a team of young detectives (and also lovers) hired by the family to assist the police in the search for their missing little girl. Beanie Feldstein (Amy Madigan) and her husband Lionel (Titus Welliver) believe that the PIs, despite their protestations at never handling such a heavy case, can find out more about the fate of their four year-old niece from the people in the neighborhood than those with badges and uniforms.

The missing girl's mother Helene (Amy Ryan) is in no state to

stay atop the case, so consumed is she by her drug addiction. Morgan Freeman plays the man in charge of the case, Detective Jack Doyle, head of the Crimes Against Children police task force. Often caught on camera by the local news hounds, he expresses the sincerity of his efforts by reminding the audience that years before his child was abducted and never found. At first reluctant, he then agrees to cooperate with the pair—if they keep out of his way.

The family's assumption about the PIs proves correct, with many secrets dragged into the light, virtually everyone involved turning out to be not what they seem to be. As bewildering incidents pile up (along with bodies), and Patrick and Angie are drawn into a final shocking revelation of the fate of the little girl, the PIs have to make an agonizing decision that will affect forever the future of all concerned, including their own relationship. This is a powerful study of the human heart and mind, so aptly plumbed so many centuries ago by the psalmist.

For Reflection/Discussion

Yes, there are probably spoilers in this section.

- 1) How does this film compare to the usual detective genre film? To *Mystic River*? Patrick and Angie are not exactly hard boiled detectives, are they?
- 2) How does the film tie in with the concerns of just about any parent?
- 3) At what turns in the plot were you really surprised? Why? Were you confused at times, especially by events that happened in the dark? What do you think of the director/writers' risk at confusing us? Note how different this is to the old detective films of the 1930/40's in which everything was explained by the hero after the bad guys had been thwarted.

4) This is a film with a pivotal decision that a character has to make. What do you think of the decision? What consequences will it have? Including for the one who decided? Do you think it was the right one, or not? Do you believe that this was a case in which truth must win out, regardless of consequences? Or does truth need to be tempered at times by love and compassion?

5) In the dark world of this film where might we see the hand of God? Do you think that any of the characters are equipped to see God in their circumstances?